

HEAD OF PRESENCE INTERVIEW WITH *ORA NEWS TV*

Live on 'Tonight with Ilva Tare', 24 May

Q: Introduces and welcomes HoP onto “Tonight,” What were your first impressions on arriving in Tirana?

A: I thought it was a most interesting, most important mission to help Albania meet its International commitments. I instantly liked working with Albanians. What I liked in coming here was seeing the optimism in their faces - especially of the ordinary people and that makes it worthwhile in helping them to move forward at all levels. That is, of course, officials at political levels, working with parties, working with leaders of political parties, working with MPs and also with people who are interested in politics but are not themselves politicians, like members of civil society. So I have the feeling that I was in the right place and have a very interesting and a very important task here in Tirana and in other parts of Albania.

Q: Did your previous posting in Kosovo/UNMiK help you in becoming more familiar with the Albanian environment?

A: Certainly that was a good, let us say time of work, I do not want to call it a ‘warm up’ because they are different. Over the last 100 years, the history of Kosovo is very different from the history of Albania. Albania has had the privilege of being a sovereign country. Kosovo has a very special history and also that includes, of course, the largest number of Kosovo Albanians. And working with them, ordinary working people and politicians, has familiarised me even more. I had already worked earlier from Belgrade in the former Yugoslavia including Kosovo issues, but not all that much. It was back in 1991-92, when other issues were much more urgent. So the time in Kosovo was most interesting. We managed to keep it in a peaceful manner throughout most of the period so that people could live in more peaceful, more orderly conditions. Of course, that helps also to understand some of the mentality, I would say.

Q: Role of OSCE Presence in Albania, what are your main commitments which your mandate permits, which expires on 31 December, 2011?

A: Indeed, it is an annual mandate. Every field mission gets the mandate through a decision from the participating states, assembling at the Permanent Council in Vienna on the basis of the commitments every participating state has with the other participating states. Albania is one of them, of the fifty six participating states that reach from Vancouver to Vladivostok, thus including all the nations in the North of the globe. These commitments start with democratization, the rule of law, and human rights and a series of other issues that make democracies, that make people live in a good, sound, safe and hopefully also prosperous environment and helping and seeing to help them meet these commitments.

Q: What are the reasons that compel the OSCE to be here on a more or less permanent basis?

A: The direction Albania is heading is towards European integration and the commitments towards OSCE participating states and the need to approach EU standards, where democratization and the rule of law are prerequisites; and they are also necessary to certain extent to being a fully fledged NATO member.

Q: How difficult is it to promote these values in an environment where political tension is so high as in Albania?

A: The interest of the people, of the general public is relatively great, some of our tasks are fairly technical and some not so. Some of the projects that we have show that women have a very

important role in society. Every society has men and women working together, co-operating to have a better society, and in that case, for example, women playing their part through their ideas.

Q: And so it is not difficult to work on the ground, you haven't come up against any difficulties?

A: No. I like working here. It is certainly at some stages a challenge. We have to always get the full picture, working with all parts of society or working with all parts of the political spectrum. This takes some energy but in the larger sense this is very important for humanity and in this sense for here in Albania. Working with Albanians is quite some fun. I tell you why, because people here learn quickly. I am sometimes amazed that even people who did not have so much time to go to school speak languages fairly well. Things like that impress me and Albanians are interested in learning things. This is really good and encouraging.

Q: Are you satisfied with the level of the implementation of reforms your organization has undertaken?

A: Yes, I am, with some of them. However, I think of some of the more complex ones, requiring profound developments in legislation and common work in the Parliament are stuck in the current situation, situation by the way which I found when I came to Albania last September. What this nation, at this stage, would need most is a fully functioning Parliament with more consensus across the aisle, which would make Opposition a full part of the legislative process. In certain stages, when it comes to good legislation this is important for the reform agenda.

Q: The rules which are needed to implement this legislation, do they exist, are the laws implementable?

A: Many of the rules are there, you have a Constitution. You have pretty, but not a full set of legislation base, for example no Civil Administrative Courts, there are many parts are now in place. To a certain extent it is also related to training and in training officials and civil servants in certain aspects to apply these rules in the best possible way. This takes a great deal of experience, it takes a good portion of good will to develop them in training in a consensual way-and this is a part of our work. It is a fairly good grade because the important thing is that it is worthwhile. I do not want to paint everything in rosy colours, but this nation has had a difficult start after 50 years of a severe situation under Hoxha and changing that completely in 20 years is a huge process. Allow me to compare it in time; I am a German diplomat, I grew up in Germany, we had unification almost around the same period as the process of democracy began here in Albania. It still takes time for people to get accustomed to it. The same applies for Albania. It takes patience. At the same time, it takes a certain impatience too, to move things forward. However, Election Day was calm. Many people, a large part of the population, and I think that was very impressive, took part in the elections and cast their ballot peacefully. Yes, it works, it takes some time, making democracy work. This is part of our task.

Q: I do understand what you are saying, as I do understand the impatience of the Albanian people, because life is very short. That is why Albanians seem to be losing their patience facing the immaturity of our institutions, and their suspicious performance. Are the Albanian institutions independent, and do they work in compliance with the OSCE standards and criteria?

A: This is a tricky question, and I can not say an absolute 'Yes' or 'No' here. Let me say that they are fairly good. It is, of course, very important that every official, every civil servant should provide the same level of service to any member of society. That leads to the fact that there should be no discrimination, despite their personal background. People should all get the same level of service. There is on some occasions room for improvement, sometimes the society seems

to be a little bit too much family-oriented and not so much society-oriented, and finding a balance there would be important. Having more openness, having more fair society for all, based on and oriented to the rule of law, would be helpful, also to develop democracy, because the family background for every citizen, young or old should not make a difference.

Q: Organizations and associations are responsible for raising the awareness, and educating the public in that regard. Is this being done, and who is doing that?

A: Allow me to say that nowadays the modern media has a big responsibility to provide information. The important base starts with good education, it is true. I do not want to generalize too much how to 'train' general public. However, for us, for our mandate, it is important to help for example with police service, so that the police provide a high level of professionalism. So we have done some training in the past, as with the border police, as well as for the civil registry, a couple of other issues related with the civil registry dealing with passports, which helped also with other issues like the visa-free travel to the Schengen area. All these are elements of a civil society, also part of the civil service in providing always a better and more efficient level of services in order to make the society more stable. So it is very complex, very intensive at different levels, and an organization like the OSCE focuses on some part of it. The other parts are being done either by other International mission and Embassies. This is a joint support for Albania, which is done by the OSCE, but not only the OSCE.

Q: Let us now Mr. Ambassador open the chapter or the file of the elections. Which term would you prefer better, chapter or file?

A: Either way, elections happen regularly in a democracy, and maybe chapter, file.

Q: Were the 2009 OSCE/ODIHR recommendations addressed by the political parties? If not, why, and who is responsible for that?

A: The 31 recommendations of the 2009 OSCE/ODIHR report were not properly addressed. The latest attempt to come to a really good agreement was initiated by the Chair of the DP Parliamentary Group Mr. Patozi. In the beginning, it was welcomed by all parties, but later it was reduced to four parties if I remember right. It was an expression of good will for a fair campaign and fair proceedings. In autumn last year, we had a very good initiative in having at least one round table, where all the party chairs participated and tackled the subject. However, the Election Code reform is, of course, very complex, and needs a sound discussion and sound reflection, and the integration of a large number of expertise coming from the Parliament, coming from the parties, coming from civil society. This is also something that needs time. Having at least initiated that in October it was still a little bit late before the scheduled elections for May. So, part of the reason was the time factor, but another reason was that the situation after the 2009 elections was unclear, and not a good one for decision-making and the boycott in the Parliament is really a problem for Albania, because it is an impediment for the integration process as well.

Q: Do you think that the political impasse after the 2009 elections influenced the standards of the 2011 local elections?

A: The recommendations were set up to make the process smoother. For these elections, there will be a report from the ODIHR Observation Mission, and it will come out in about two months. The report from September 2009 and the recommendations could have made the process even smoother, if some of the 31 points could have been taken on board. However, the important thing is that good will exists, so that all participate in preparing and exercising the office duty during this complex process, do their best and stick to the rules, and truthfully do their job, and this is the most important thing. One of these points, which are the good will, trust in each-other is certainly an area where we have to work on more.

Q: Is there actually any trust between the parties at the moment?

A: I do trust the parties. This is not the problem. In Albania, the important thing is that the Albanian parties trust each-other. This is much more important than what the internationals think, not that it does not matter, but the key thing in building the society is that Albanians do it, that Albanians trust each-other as much as possible. One area of building trust or one possibility is doing things jointly, like being together in these commissions on the Election Day and preparing for Election Day. Doing it in partnership is also important during the counting process. I was present at times in the counting centres, and it was good to see that the commissioners were sitting around one table, from different party backgrounds, and not having a tense face. They were talking to each-other, respecting each-other, and I had the impression they were doing the best they could in counting, and this was good to see.

Q: This is what happens at the low level, but when you get to the higher levels, there is a lack of trust there. Have you seen that?

The most important thing for the country is its people, so this is the best news Albania has to offer. Albanians are great people, and it's good that they participated, and they should also make their leaders understand that, and respect the same degree of civility.

Q: Yes, of course, but the citizen's duty is to cast their vote. Once they do that, it is then the leaders who decide.

A: Right, but there's also a next election, and the people can decide whom to trust. There is no guarantee and there is no need to always vote the same way. Politicians would always like that the public chose the same colour, but it is a competition. It is about trust. It is about the future. This is probably the most important. And this is how it should function in Albania. This is seen in Tirana, in the Mayoral race. They were so incredibly close so it does not matter which data you take, the one of the last night or one of today. They were so close. It was so close so that it showed that every vote counts. It showed that it could go either way. It could not have been more dramatic.

Q: Do you have a comment on the activity of the CEC during the preparation for the local government elections on 8 May, on the e-day and after the e-day? Let's start from the beginning with the preparations. How was the performance of the CEC?

A: The work of the CEC was, of course, very intense and complex. They should instruct and advice on establishing the commission of the election for administrative zones, and they had to do it within strict deadlines, close to Election Day. The political parties, to a large extent, did not cooperate fully in giving the needed feedback in due time, and this made the work of the CEC more difficult at some stages to deliver all the decisions and print the ballots in due time. But seeing all that, I mentioned only some of the details, and apart from the fact that their performance was fairly good in the preparation work, a complex preparation work, and in all the voting centres people could vote. There were 2 X 384 voting processes for mayor and municipal council – a huge and complex task.

Q: The fact there were lots of votes put in different boxes that were not for the candidates, does it has something on the performance of the CEC on educating and informing voters how to vote?

A: Of course, it is human to make an error. It is a Latin saying "*errare humanum est*", though that can happen. In a normal voting centre, you have two boxes, in Tirana you had four. The colours were not very different, and so errors could happen. The majority of the ballots cast were in the right box, and the number of miscast ballots was small. Of course, there is a major concern as

what happens to the miscast ballots and what is the legal situation on this issue. Although I would not comment on the CEC legal decision-making, I think it is important that the votes are counted objectively. I believe that the counting process has been such. To a very large extent, it was well prepared but both sides were too close and everything had to be handled with utmost care and in full compliance with the rule of law. So surely we will see more analysis on that and I believe this is very important.

Q: Were the lawyers and experts of the OSCE aware of the normative acts approved by the CEC with 4 votes in favour and 3 against on the opening of the contested votes?

A: We were following the process. The ODIHR Election Observation Mission had the closest look on that. For us, it was very important to have a *first hand* impression on the long run and also how elections were prepared and managed afterwards. There have regularly been members of my staff, who have been present at the CEC meetings. They have good knowledge, and they also provide advice to me and to my team on how we can then develop proposals for electoral reform to come to even better elections.

Q: What was the legitimacy of the CEC act?

This is a question for the Albanian side. The important thing for us is that all the ballots are counted, and that there should be consistency in the way misplaced ballots are treated. It should also be analyzed whether this was fully the case.

Q: Do you think that the CEC should have published the preliminary results for Tirana on Saturday when the counting was over, or was that not obligatory?

That depends on how you read the Electoral Code. The public perception was what it was, the media reported on that day, and this is a very important question. The public expects to know where they are so by the end of the counting there should have been some preliminary results. The Electoral Code does not foresee that in the exact same way. There were probably good reasons in extending the Election Observation Mission but I would have suggested a public line of where we all stood.

Q: What do you think about the CEC's yesterday announcement? What do you think the opposition thinks about it?

This shall be certainly scrutinized by legal experts and the Electoral College so I would not like to make any legal comments. Such judgements have to be done by the Albanian experts who are capable of that.

Q: Are you aware of any other cases where the CEC has acted similarly with the misplaced ballots or can we say that the CEC used double standards in Tirana?

I have seen the ODIHR report, and I will refrain from making any comments at this stage. ODIHR was present and we have the picture through them, so let us all wait for their final report.

Q: What do you think about the opposition's claim about the discrepancy between the number of votes and the number of voters? We are talking about 870 votes more than voters.

This of course is a question of possible concern. If there are discrepancies, it should be scrutinized, and there should be an explanation for such a difference.

Q: The opposition also claims that there has been some tampering with the ballot boxes. Have your experts expressed such concerns?

The process and the transport to my knowledge were observed. However, that must be carefully checked. So it is impossible for me to comment. I have taken note of the situation, and I do understand the concerns, but I think you have the institution that will analyze the situation. I want to repeat that the race was so close that every step should be carefully analyzed. It is, however, legitimate to raise that question.

Q: Do you think that there has been some political background in the CEC decisions?

There were, of course, comments from outside the CEC in relation to their work. But that work is purely technical, technical support for voters to be able to vote. Given the situation, with the impasse in the parliament, the situation was politicised, even though we did not want it to be.

Q: Which of the political sides had more influence on the CEC?

There are two sides in the CEC, and it would be difficult to say who did not try to influence matters.

Q: I personally think that the truth can not have two sides. Do you at least share the same opinion?

Although there is only one CEC, some members are more majority-nominated and the others are opposition-nominated, so there are two sides. In a certain way, it is also good to have that cooperation based on a good will. It is necessary to have a fair view on what's developing on both sides. But the key element is that everyone wishes for more, and I am not the only one.

Q: You have been quite active together with the US Ambassador, and the EU Ambassador, in what is among the media people being referred to as the *Ambassadors' Troika* in your meeting with the authorities, and with Albanian politicians. I would like to ask you whether there are any differences in the way you see specific issues?

No, not on the *core* political issues. Of course, I am representing an organization that is not so easy to understand. It is about democratization, human rights, rule of law, while Ambassador Arvizu represents a large nation as is the United States with a scheme of additional task like ... and commerce and so on. The task of the EU Ambassador Sequi is certainly even wider than mine. Our task as the OSCE is a fundamental one in really seeking to the core values and leading to more integration be it on the defence side, be it on the commercial side, be it regional, In that respect, a common understanding is needed to make democracy even more stable. We have the same heartbeat when it comes democratic principles and the rule of law. We are absolutely in line when it comes to the full necessity for the rule of law, or on these post-election days. So we have a lot of things in common, even though our tasks are not completely identical. It is very good that we can do that jointly to support the country.

Q: How come the Ambassadors would always go precisely to those counting centres where there were problems, like counting centre 5, as it turned into a legend in Tirana. Was it the political parties which called you, or was it your experts? Why did you go there every time things were blocked? And every time you showed up, it was like a miracle, everything was suddenly unblocked.

We are also having our TV sets on to get information. We are not sitting in our offices and waiting for things to just happen. We try to be *hands on*, and also showing solidarity with the ones who were counting. I thought the persons who were counting at the counting centres did really a tremendous job with a lot of energy, and, of course, it was also for us exciting to see how they did it, how was the atmosphere in there, and how much it took to these days to do it in a correct way, sometimes with a high level of noise.

Q: What have you and the other Ambassadors discussed with PM Berisha, Mr. Rama, and the President? What stands have you as the Head of the OSCE asked them to take?

First of all, I would say that I personally have a very good working relation with all those you have mentioned, which is very important, not only speaking to the leaders, but also supporters. The concern of the last days, the main concern is the rule of law, not easy since the Electoral Code does not regulate everything. So it is up to the Albanian side to come up with clarifications, and hopefully to a consensus, which is needed to pave the way for an understanding especially in the Parliament for the integration agenda. The other thing is staying calm in the sense that while making the point that it is very important that the situation remains peaceful, that things are done in a highly civilized way of discussing, tacking the legal points and coming to a satisfactory conclusion for all. That can, of course, only be done in a peaceful way.

Q: There is a perception, Mr. Ambassador among the media, and among the society in Albania that Ambassadors agree with whoever politician they meet with. Is this true?

We are not here to hit people. This is probably the most important thing. Agreeing with just everything is, of course, not possible, and our national partners know that. Sometimes, we just take note that our positions do not coincide, but I did not get any contradictions from any side when it comes to the importance of the rule of law. However, while saying that, it is quite clear that in some cases, and also in some pivotal cases, it is not read in the same way, but this is a legal matter and should be solved in the right manner, and not in the streets, or through loud or rough talking, but through experts and through legal arguments. I am sure that this will also be possible in Albania.

Q: So, you have expressed your opinion to the Albanian politicians. How did they react?

They listened carefully, and because they are interested in coming to a solution that is viable and that paves the way for the future.

Q: You have recently met even with the Chair of the CEC, Mr. Ristani. Have you expressed any concerns about the work of the CEC in these last days of the counting process? What did you share with him?

No, during the counting process I have not met him. I met him before the elections on regular basis, but not during counting because this is very technical, and there is no need to interfere and now also in these days. This is work which the CEC acting as a CEAZ, and this was not the place for me to intervene. That contact was done by the Head of the Election Observation Mission, Jonathan Stonestreet.

Q: How do you explain the fact that Albania is still behind in terms of the maturity of its institutions to solve the problems within ourselves, within the institutions themselves, asking also for interventions by the internationals? How do you explain this handicap?

That is not so easy to answer because you also have here in the country rational and talented people. Perhaps they are not courageous enough. We would certainly like to see a stronger civil society in debating, not only political, but it could be educational issues. But, at this stage, we can help, and that is why we are here. But it would be very good if the solutions could come from Albanian society.

Q: Do you see this happening any time soon?

It's improving. For example, the 'Civil Forum 2010' with former Presidents Moisiu and Meidani and a lot of other personalities have come up with very good ideas. The tendency is very encouraging, so I think it is improving.

Q: Do you think that the Electoral College enjoys the right level of reliability in giving a lawful decision to be in the end respected by all political parties in Albania?

I am sure about that. The judges are professional. I do not see a reason why they should not. I would also expect people to trust, including the parties, that they will carefully analyse the findings, and that the results will be accepted. That takes me to a point I touched upon earlier. We have not seen the final results yet. There is a preliminary result and now the appeals period is about to start, so there will be no final results until this is concluded. Once this is solved, we can talk about the final result that should be accepted by the political parties.

Q: I believe you are also aware of a high level of lack of trust in the legal system in Albania. We have now the so-called 'double standard'. Mr. Ambassador, are you at the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania going to encourage the Electoral College to take a fair, lawful and uninfluenced decision?

Absolutely yes! They have to apply all the rules that the country has, starting with the Constitution, but certainly including the Electoral Code, analyzing the decisions taken by the CEC and the basis on which the CEC has taken them. So they have a big complex task, and I believe that they are not only willing to take such a decision, but that they are also capable of doing so. Let us try so that there is not too much public noise in commenting on the judges. The independence of the judges is certainly a very important issue in a society.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, was the election process of May 8th better than earlier processes? So, did Albania take any steps ahead, is it still in the same place, or did it take any steps backwards?

Let me perhaps say one thing here - this is focusing on Election Day. My personal perception was that it was a good day, I saw a large participation, citizens throughout the country could cast their vote, and they had a variety of choices, and they did so. I saw that the technical preparations were good, and even what happened later, but the Election Day was a good day for democracy. As my personal impression about this day was somewhat unscientific, let us leave that to ODIHR.

Q: Concerns are actually not related with the Election Day, but with happened next, i.e. the vote counting and administration.

I think that the important thing is that people throughout the country are more interested in casting their vote, and the participation was unexpectedly high, higher than what was expected in local elections. This is a very good sign that shows that people are interested in those that will manage their cities, villages, municipalities. I think this shows a high degree of interest. However, people, voters at all ages, have other things to do in their lives. That is why the politicians then have to take over and provide local services. One could think for the citizens that after the elections, they should trust that the system will find the solutions, the system that was in the boxes, and trust that the services will come from those they elected. Otherwise, we would have endless elections, if people would not trust those they have elected.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, the vote in Albania is administered by party supporters. Does this constitute a failure of the rule of law in the interest of the political parties?

No, there is nothing wrong with party supporters and the way they operate. You can be a party supporter and do it in a respectful way, also in a balanced way. If I am not completely wrong, we have seen that in the counting centres here as well. Therefore, to be honest, I do not see any problems with this administration. People were very civilized in most cases.

Q: Do you think that the internationals somehow blessed the constitutional changes made by the two leaders of the country, Berisha and Rama, two years ago?

Although it has been widely commented on that this might have been the case, allow me to say in a modest way that I do not overrate this. The most important contributions came from Albanians. The main contribution came from those that cast their ballot, those who served their community in the zone commissions throughout the country, in the 66 counting centres, counting through days and nights, sometimes in not so easy working conditions. So it was fairly good. Perhaps politicians can decide in the future to make the life easier for the counting process, in having it again more decentralized. Then it is also based on the final ODIHR report recommendations.

Q: That was exactly my next question about ODIHR potential recommendations about the use of electronic and automatic methods in counting like punch cards, optical scanners, or voting booths to make the voting faster. Do you think this could be a useful suggestion for Albania?

If you have the global picture of democracy, there are all sorts of ways as you mentioned. This depends on what the society agrees on. You can use any ways Albanian citizens feel comfortable with. I like the traditional way of having a piece of paper, make a cross so that you have something in your hands, and you literally cast your vote, and not simply push a button. Although there are people who prefer to push a button, in which case you have the advantage that you do not count a large pile of ballots. So it is certainly a matter of preference, this is certainly not the only way.

Q: Maybe a faster way of voting would give us the results much sooner, i.e. a few hours, and not a few days after the elections, not to mention the lack of trust between the parties, and non-acceptance of the results in the end.

That maybe true.

Q: How does the OSCE see the coverage of these elections by the Albanian media?

The coverage was really impressive. First of all, we were driving overland, listening to the radio and you had the impression that that was a football match, because the ballots were called by names, going Basha-Rama, Basha-Rama, Basha-Rama It was exactly like a tennis match, and there were also those 'void' ballots. Everybody knew, we also knew in the car that it was so close, it was really a race with a heartbeat, and up until the last minute it was not clear who past the finish line first. What we saw and heard was high suspense and I have the impression that the media did a wonderful job making democracy transparent and more interesting for the people providing a first hand picture. It really matters that every vote counts and that is why it is so important to have a precise and a consistent counting process.

Q: The opposition thinks that it is impossible in mathematical and statistical terms for the result to have been 50:50 by the end, and see a trend of 70:30 in favour of Basha in the ballot boxes open by the CEC for the contested votes. What do you think about this?

I have seen publications on that. We would have to ask the statisticians, but several ones would give several opinions. Usually when it comes to large numbers beyond 1000, it becomes more precise. Underneath a certain figure, say 700, the oscillations can be higher. I am an engineer and an economist by profession, so I studied some statistics, and even if some issues may appear improbable, they are still possible, so arguing statistics sounds interesting. What is needed is a careful analysis, how it was processed, how it was counted, whether figures coincide etc?

Q: What is your comment on the balance achieved by Ora news in covering these elections?

Their work has been excellent. This is really professional journalism, and a good sign of fairness. Of course, one can ask whether it was really exactly shared equally between the two political colours. It probably is. The important thing is giving political parties, the protagonists, and the

candidates a chance to provide voters with information about what they stand for, what they promise, what is their programme. That is important for people to make up their minds.

Q: Ora News TV was the first one to refuse broadcasting ready-made tapes for the sake of the professional standards and media freedom that we have gained.

It is very important for the journalists to have the energy and have direct access. It is important for them to go where things happen, interview key actors, be present when speeches are held, make first hand impressions, adding sometimes their comments. It is important not to rely on ready-made tapes. That is an important ingredient for journalism. If ready made tapes were sent, that would be like a commercial, and that is a new chapter. While they could have been useful, it is not journalism.

Q: Serious companies involved in surveys and exit polls refused to do any exit polls this year because of a high level of refusals by respondents. Are exit polls and surveys reliable?

It is not so important for us who wins. What is important for us is that there is a due process, and every candidate has a chance to discuss, and have their votes counted. The only ones who decide are the citizens, who decide who they want to have as mayors and who they want to have in the municipal councils. It is not for internationals to do that, we do not even think of this. For us, it is very important to have equal conditions for all.

Q. The transparency of financing of political parties was one of ODIHR concerns in the 2009 elections. Is it normal for the CEC to do the transparency of the political parties?

In every country there is a need for a regulation of political party financing. It would be good to have the highest level of transparency. However, even in my own country there are also some challenges. The political parties should have transparency, and this is not easy because there are donations, and certain people may create influences that could be legitimate for as long as they remain transparent. This is the main thing in a democracy, a key ingredient. It is important to know who to trust. The CEC is a technical body, they have a budget, they have their expenditures, and their budget is transparent.

Q: Two years from 2009 and the ODIHR recommendations are not yet addressed by the political parties. Does it make any sense to have other recommendations while the political climate is worse?

Yes, of course, it makes sense. The 2011 elections were local elections, and one of the preliminary observations that we had even before the Election Day, and already before ODIHR came, is that the largest part of the Electoral Code addresses parliamentary election issues, and does not have a *tailor-made* chapter for local elections. This is certainly an area to work on. It is also expected that the final ODIHR report will address that and give some recommendations.

Q: Were the May elections free and fair and in compliance with the OSCE/ODIHR standards?

This question will be answered in the ODIHR final report, which usually comes two months after the mission leaves.